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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Thursday, March 3, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Before the Full Natural Resources Committee
Oversight Hearing on: "Department of the Interior Spending and the President's Fiscal
Year 2012 Budget Proposal."

Thank you Secretary Salazar for being here today. While the Committee didn't get a chance to hear from you on President Obama's last two budgets, we're pleased to have you here this year at a time when there is a great need to control spending.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the spending and programs of the Department of the Interior and the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2012 budget. As everyone is aware, our country is currently facing a \$14 trillion debt. This debt is threatening our economy, our nation's ability to remain competitive, and the future security of our children and grandchildren. It's long past time to get serious about cutting spending and addressing this debt head-on. That will require setting priorities and making tough choices on how best to direct scarce taxpayer dollars.

When it comes to highlighting spending that taxpayers simply cannot afford, I must bring attention to the \$900 million in the President's budget for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is primarily used to purchase more federal land. This represents a \$553 million increase above Fiscal Year 2008 levels.

The Department of the Interior has a maintenance backlog on public lands that measures in the billions of dollars.

I believe the government has a responsibility to maintain and care for our existing lands before spending money we don't have to acquire more and more and more land.

In addition to spending, we will also examine how several Interior Department policies are directly costing American jobs.

This includes the regulatory drought in California's San Joaquin Valley where the government has withheld valuable water from communities, prioritizing the needs of a three-inch fish over thousands of workers and their families.

And the Department's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement's pursuit of sweeping changes to stream regulations that by their own admission will cost thousands of American jobs.

Finally, no discussion about jobs is complete without mentioning the President's de facto drilling moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico that has left thousands of Americans out of work.

Gasoline prices have risen 20 cents in the last week. Higher gasoline prices not only mean increased costs at the pump, but that families will pay more for groceries, farmers will pay more for farm, and small businesses will pay more to operate. Higher gasoline prices have a substantial impact on every American and every aspect of our already fragile economy.

But instead of focusing on ways to produce our own American energy, the Administration is deepening America's dependence on unstable, hostile foreign countries. The de facto drilling moratorium in the Gulf is simply the latest example of the Administration blocking access to our nation's energy resources.

The official moratorium on deepwater drilling was lifted over four months ago, yet the Administration just this week issued the first permit. The people in the Gulf need more than just one token permit. One permit will not put thousands of people back to work. We need to see real progress and the immediate issuance of additional permits.

I also hope to hear further details today on the \$358.4 million budget request for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement. This is \$119.3 million above Fiscal Year 2010 levels. We all share the goal of wanting to make U.S. offshore drilling the safest in the world, and I don't doubt that additional funds will be needed to hire more inspectors. But we need to make certain that this money will be used to actually improve safety and resume offshore drilling.

I believe most of us can agree that bigger government does not generally equate to better government. This Committee is specifically interested in how increased funding and staffing will improve the process and foster increased American energy production. The goal should be to make this agency better and faster, not bigger and slower.

In light of the current fiscal crisis, it's important to remember that American energy production offshore and on public lands generates billions of dollars in revenue. Not only do we create jobs by producing energy in the U.S., but we help lower the debt and deficit, and we prevent our energy dollars from being sent overseas to foreign countries.

But instead of increasing production and thereby reducing the deficit, the Administration has proposed to increase the cost of producing American energy by raising a multitude of taxes. The President's budget includes over \$60 billion in higher taxes and fees on American energy production. This will lead to less energy, higher costs and fewer American jobs.

If you increase the cost of producing gasoline, you raise the price of gasoline at the pump. The last thing families and businesses need right now is for gasoline prices to climb even higher.

These are just a few of the issues I hope to further discuss at today's hearing and I look forward to hearing from the Secretary.